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ABSTRACT

In spite of the fact that movement has occurred, vocational education and job placement services for individuals with disabilities have produced few significant results in the past 10 years. Since school represents an institution where children gather on a consistent and long-term basis, the facilities are available and usually comprehensive, and the opportunities for collaboration and cooperation are almost boundless, it would seem sensible for school districts to employ rehabilitation counselors to become an integral part of the student services team. What seems to be at issue is a growing demand for services that remains unanswered. It is too late to begin the transition process after graduation, or even in the final year of formal education. Since each child with a disability is unique, individual transition plans must be developed for each, along with the individualized educational plan. The services of vocational rehabilitation are not entitlement services but eligibility services, meaning that although a child might qualify for special services in the school system, he or she may not qualify for rehabilitative services. That leaves many children outside the adult service delivery system with little or no preparation in the world of work. The development and coordination of services by a school based rehabilitation counselor can provide appropriate identification and utilization of resources in order to ensure that the full potential of children with disabilities is realized. (LLL)

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The Value of School-Based Rehabilitation Counselors

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Abstract

With the ever increasing numbers of children with disabilities mainstreaming through the educational system, it has become apparent that more specialized services are needed to aid in the successful transitioning from school to work. The rehabilitation counselor has both the training and expertise to identify the individualized needs of the child with a disability as well as coordinate all aspects of the transitional process. This paper will discuss the value and importance of the rehabilitation counselor in the school setting in order to insure children with disabilities reach their maximum potential.

The Value of School-Based Rehabilitation Counselors

While transition from school to adulthood presents serious challenges for adolescents and their families, these challenges can be overwhelming and insurmountable for youth with disabilities (Szymanski & King, 1989). Facilitating transition from school to work is not a one step process, but requires movement from school instruction to planning for the transition process to placement into employment (Wehman, Moon, Everson, Wood & Barcus, 1988). The crucial factor in enabling students to make effective use of their education and training and make a successful transition from school to work is a coordinated service delivery system (Szymanski, 1984). The special training of rehabilitation counselors prepares them to coordinate school and community resources into an effective transition program (Szymanski & King, 1989).

Though counseling roles related to special education are defined in the regulations for school psychologists, school social workers, and speech pathologists, they are not delineated for school or

rehabilitation counselors (Humes, Szymanski, & Hohenshil, 1989). Confusion is evident within both the educational and vocational rehabilitation systems as to how, where and when rehabilitation counselors should be utilized (Szymanski, 1984). Because rehabilitation counseling was not among those related services mentioned in the regulations of PL 94-142, the Education of All Handicapped Children Act of 1975, the regulations of many state education departments have become restrictive to the profession, frequently thwarting schools' efforts to hire rehabilitation counselors (Szymanski, 1984). This purpose of this paper is to show the value of school-based rehabilitation counselors; their ability to effectively identify and coordinate services, as well as provide additional counseling to students, parents and staff.

Historical Perspective

As a result of Public Law 113 (Barden-LaFollette Act) in 1943, vocational rehabilitation services were extended to people with mental retardation. In response, some states developed cooperative plans

with special education departments in local school districts (DiMichael, 1950). Although the need for vocational rehabilitation counselors in the school setting was clearly expressed in the literature of the time (Haasurd and Moore, 1950), little action was taken (Szymanski, 1984).

During the 1960's the provision of vocational rehabilitation counseling services to school aged individuals with disabilities expanded as a result of the workstudy programs developed (Szymanski, 1984). The rehabilitation counselor became employed by the school system in order to: 1) assist teachers in preparing students for job interviews; 2) counsel students in the area of work-related behaviors; 3) provide liaison between the Director of Special Education and the classroom; 4) provide liaison between the Local Rehabilitation Office and the appropriate cooperative educational board; 5) provide the necessary documentation required by the Department of Rehabilitation and the Department of Labor and Employment; and 6) provide job placement and follow-up (Riggar and Riggar, 1978).

During the 1970's services were greatly increased through enabling legislation such as: 1) PL 93-112, the 1973 Rehabilitation Act initiating the Individual Written Rehabilitation Plan, including sections 503 and 504 which opened the doors to education and employment for people with disabilities; 2) PL 94-142, The Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975; 3) PL 94-482, The Vocational Education Amendments of 1977; and 4) The Comprehensive Employment and Training Act, which was later replaced by the Job Training and Partnership Act of 1983 (Szymanski, 1984). On October 17, 1977, the U.S. Commissioner of Education, and the U.S. Commissioner of Rehabilitation issued a joint memorandum addressing the issue of collaboration between Education and Vocational Rehabiltation agencies, involving state vocational rehabilitation agencies in vocational planning and coordinating service delivery during the school years (Szymsanski, 1984). Many model programs developed throughout the country providing service linkages and facilitating the transition of students with disabilities from school to work. The need for earlier career experiences,

consultative assistance from Vocational Rehabilitation services , increased development of prevocational and work related curriculums, more integration between education and rehabilitation's goals as well as greater interagency cooperation and planning became apparent (Dysseguard, 1980; Frith & Edwards, 1982; McInerney & Karan, 1981; Leadership Training Institute, 1980; Wurzberg, 1982).

Despite the severe cutbacks to social programs in the 1980's, federal legislation was passed to promote and enhance the career development of students with disabilities. Section 626 of the 1983 Amendments to the Education of the Handicapped Act of 1975 addressed the educational and employment transition difficulties of students with disabilities, authorizing $6.6 million in grants and contracts to be spent annually by the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation Services. The Carl D. Perkins Vocational Education Act of 1984 provided additional funds to implement career development services for students with disabilities, requiring that there be information about vocational education opportunities provided to students and

parents no later than ninth grade, guidance and counseling services by trained counselors, assessment of abilities, interests, and needs, and inculsion of vocational services as a component of the student's IEP. Other legislation passed to enhance career development include the Projects with Industry Program, authorized in 1968, the Rehabilitation Act Amendment of 1986, and the Developmental Disabilities Act Amendments of 1984 (Brolin & Gysbers, 1989). These legislative initiatives increased the focus towards coordination of service delivery systems, giving new impetus to the provision of rehabilitation counseling services in the school program (Szymanski, 1984).

Obviously aware of the necessity to delineate the rehabilitation counselor's role in the school setting, the Committee on Education and Labor submitted the following report as part of the Education of the Handicapped Act Amendments of 1990 (HR 101-544):

> Rehabilitation counseling is a counseling profession with a specific focus on disability, including career development and employment preparation of people with disabilities. As a

result, rehabilitation counseling is an important related service in special education as well as an important transition service in preparing students with disabilities for employment or postsecondary education. It is the intent of the Committee that rehabilitation counseling be considered a related service and be provided to all students with disabilities for whom this service is necessary for the achievement of the individualized education program.

It is also the intent of the Committee to have rehabilitation counseling considered as an allowable transition service. School rehabilitation counseling is an important component of transition services because none of the other professionals involved in special education have the clear reponsibility for transition planning and preparation. Furthermore, the rehabilitation counseling discipline embodies the wide range of knowledge needed for successful school to work transition, i.e., vocational implications of disability, career development,

career counseling for individuals with disabilities, job placement, and job modification. Therefore, rehabilitation counselors are professionally prepared to provide the appropriate counseling services as well as to coordinate the services of the special education disciplines, adult services providers, and postsecondary education agencies to ensure effective, planned transition services for students with disabilities....

The Committee recognizes that because the State-Federal vocational rehabilitation program is an eligibility program and not an entitlement program there is no guarantee that cooperative agreements between vocational rehabilitation and special education will ensure that all students with disabilites who need rehabilitation services will receive such services. However, the specification of rehabilitation counseling as an allowable transition service adds rehabilitation counselors to the cadre of related service and transition professionals who can be employed

> by school districts based on individual district needs. Although these provisions do not mandate employment of rehabilitation counselors, they provide school districts with an option that had not been widely available to students with disabilities in the past. (p. 7-8)

Transitional Needs

Why has transition again come to the forefront of focus for educators, legislators, and rehabilitators? Of the approximately 300,000 handicapped youth that leave high school each year, the vast majority encounter severe unemployment and underemployment problems (Rusch & Phelps, 1987). In a report to the Senate Subcommittee on the Handicapped in 1986, citing data obtained from a Harris telephone poll, "67% of all Americans with handicaps, between the ages of 16 and 64, are not working: if an individual with a handicap is working, that person is 75% more likely to be employed part-time: of all those persons with handicaps and not working, 67% say that they want to work" (Rusch & Phelps, 1987, p.487).

According to Owings and Stocking (1985), in a national longitudinal study of a representative sample of 30,000 sophomores and 28,000 seniors, (which included self-identified students with disabilities), 22% of the sophomores with disabilities had dropped out of school between their sophomore and senior years, as compared to 2% of the nondisabled students. Further findings by these authors state that forty five percent of the sophomores with disabilities were in the lowest quartile on combined vocabulary, reading, math and science tests, as compared to only 19% of the nondisabled students. Only 29% of those students with disabilities were enrolled in vocational education programs.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau (1982) of the more than 220 million people in the United States, 30 million are disabled in one way or another, and of this number, over 11 million are potentially employable, although only 4.1 million are employed. Those who are successful in receiving vocational services often experience low wages, with 52% receiving $2000 per year, and 85% receiving under $7000 per year

(Whitehead,C., 1977-1979: U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 1983). According to the President's Committee on Employment of Persons with Disabilities (1987), 65% of working-age persons with disabilites were unemployed in 1984, although unemployment nationally ranged around seven per cent.

Approximately 10% of the school-age population is made up of children with disabilities, the majority of which is comprised of students with learning disabilities, speech impairments, mental retardation and emotional disturbances (Fagan & Jenkins, 1989). The number of children served increased 18% during the last decade (Fraas, 1986). In the Department of Education's Ninth Annual Report to Congress on the implementation of P.L. 94-142 in 1987, over half of high school students with disabilities age 16 years and older graduated with a certificate or diploma in 1984-1985 (Facts You Can Use, 1988). The figures for high school students with disabilities dropping out and failing to graduate are still high at 44% (Fagan & Jenkins, 1989). These figures are reinforced by data for 1985-1986 that further identified students with

learning disabilities, mental retardation, and emotional disturbances over 16 years of age as most likely to drop out (Hume, 1988). Meanwhile, the percent of full-time/first time college freshman reporting they have a disability has grown from 2.6% in 1978 to 7.4% in 1985 (Fagan & Jenkins. 1989).

According to Rusch and Phelps (1987), some of the problems encountered by youth with disabilities during their school years can be attributed to the lack of: 1) appropriate vocational assessment; 2) career-related objectives and transitional plans in IEPs; 3) counseling and career planning services; 4) parental involvement; 5)comprehensive work experience programs for youth while in high school; 6) cooperative programming with vocational rehabilitation and other agencies to ensure a continuum of necessary support as youths exit from high school and enter employment.

Students with disabilities are frequently placed in stereotyped occupational tracks (Chubon, 1985). They are frequently subjected to underemployment as an outgrowth of their perceived inferior and deviant

social status related to their disability (Bowe, 1978). Lowered performance expectations for students with disabilities have commonly been found among teachers and other school officials (Career Planning and Placement Center, 1981). When such expectations are present in parents, teachers, guidance counselors, and others involved in the educational process, they can lead to restricted or limited learning experiences (Chubon, 1985). Unfortunately, the same attitudes marked by lowered expectations are assimilated by the children who, in turn, lower their own aspirations (Bartel & Guskin, 1971).

According to Chubon (1985), much of the problem seems to be related to limited experiences, which together with other disability factors leaves students with disabilities boxed in with regard to their career choices. Often they arrive at their career decision with few options because of their very narrow or limited learning experiences, caused by a variety of factors including; mobility problems; preoccupation with treatment of the disabling condition; lack of sufficient role models; inaccurate role perspectives;

social immaturity, particularly with regard to decision making and problem solving; and perhaps a lack of experience in assuming personal responsibility.

The case for the provision and coordination of transitional services can best be summed up by Clark and Knowlton (1987) who stated:

> The choices one makes in life are dependent upon the opportunities one experiences and the skills one acquires. Given this notion, it is important for educators to ensure that all learners, including those with handicaps, have a wide variety of positive learning experiences, so that the choices they make contribute to their feelings of self-worth, comfort, and accomplishment... informed choice requires that decisions are based on a wide variety of real life experiences. (p.550)

The Role of the School Guidance Counselor

While counseling can assist individuals in personal growth and realization of potential (Patterson, 1986), societal, systemic, and

architectural barriers continue to impede the full participation of people with disabilities (Rubin, Garcia, Millard, & Wong 1988). Although school personnel are required by law to provide appropriate educational services to students with disabilities, school counselors must define a role that can realistically be assumed within the scope of their regular activities. School counselors would need to acquire additional knowledge about disabling conditions and their implications for multifactored assessment, specialized information services, legislative influences, IEP involvement, career development, transition, and school-agency relationships, in order to appropriately interface with the needs of children with disabilities (Humes, et al 1989).

Until recently, school counselors were not required to take specific coursework in special education or counseling students with disabilities (Humes, et al 1989). According to Brolin and Gysbers (1989), counselors need to be able to accomplish the following activities in order to provide comprehensive services to students with disabilities:

1. Conduct or arrange for career assessment.

2. Develop and use community resources, particularly for referral purposes.

3. Become an advocate.

4. Contribute to the development and monitoring of individual learning programs in cooperation with other educators and parents.

5. Consult with parents concerning the career development of their children.

6. Consult with other educators concerning the development of self-awareness and decision-making competencies.

7. Work with students in the selection of training opportunities and the selection of job possibilities.

8. Counsel students.

Hosie, Patterson, and Hollingsworth (1989) add additional competencies for counselors who wish to provide comprehensive services to students with disabilities. These include:

1. Knowledge of current federal and state legislation, guidelines, and policies.

2. Knowledge of the rights of individuals with

disabilities and their families.

3. Knowledge of state program guidelines for classification and eligibility determination.

4. Knowledge of formal and informal assessment and observational procedures.

5. Knowledge of current diagnostic tools and their limitations.

6. Knowledge of physical, mental, and emotional disabilites.

7. Knowledge of learning disorders, social and emotional behavioral problems.

8. Knowledge of input, structure, and purposes of Individualized Education Programs, Individualized Transition Programs, and Individualized Written Rehabilitation Programs.

9. Knowledge of environmental and architectural barriers.

10. Knowledge of the impact of disabilities on career decision-making processes.

11. Knowledge of community resources.

Thus, in order to provide comprehensive services to students with disabilities, school counselors must have

knowledge beyond what accredited programs in school counseling require. While the basic components of both school and rehabilitation counseling accreditation requirements are more similar than different, the requirements for rehabilitation counselors are much more specific to identifying the needs of and providing services to persons with disabilities in coordination with community resources (Hosie et al, 1989). Comprehensive guidance programs are required to work effectively and directly with all students including those with disabilities (Brolin & Gysbers, 1989).

The Role Of The Rehabilitation Counselor in the School Setting

Rehabilitation counselors can provide the bridge for students with disabilities from the academic environment to the world of work. While professional rehabilitation counselors employed directly by school systems can assist not only in the Special Education-Vocational Rehabilitation interface they also may be major resources in the transitional planning for special education students who are not eligible for

Vocational Rehabilitation services. Both services needed and eligibility requirements must be considered in planning for successful transition, for while special education is an entitlement program, VR services are not (Szymanski et al. 1989). The special training of rehabilitation counselors prepares them to coordinate existing school and community resources into effective transition programs (Szymanski & King, 1989). In addition, rehabilitation counselors are trained as specialists in the vocational behavior of persons with disabilities. While their education is similar to that provided to other counselors trained in master's programs accredited by the Council on Accreditation of Counseling and Related Education Programs, rehabilitation counselors are required to have specific coursework covering medical and psychosocial aspects of disability, job preparation and placement of persons with disabilities, and other disability concerns (Humes et al, 1989).

Most school program VR counselors, either individually or with other team members perform the following duties: 1) assessment of vocational

potential; 2) vocational planning; 3) consultation with team members on the vocational and educational implications of disability; 4) vocational and work adjustment counseling; 5) coordination of planning and service delivery; and 6) job placement and follow-up services (Szymanski & Danek, 1985).

> The key to true collaboration is held both by the systems and the people in the systems. A key person who can make the difference for students with disabilities is the rehabilitation counselor. The rehabilitation counselor can be described as a navigator assisting individual students with disabilites in threading his or her way through the diverse elements of the service delivery system. The navigation tools are the understanding of the major individual and environmental aspects of the transition and their effects on the client. (Szymanski & Danek, 1985 p. 87)

Conclusion

In spite of the fact that movement has occurred, vocational education and job placement services for individuals with disabilities have produced few significant results in the past 10 years (Brolin & Gysbers, 1989). It is difficult to determine whether the primary problem lies with the schools, which are not providing adequate career development or appropriate curriculum; the students and their parents, who may not be aware of their opportunities or choose not to pursue them; or the labor market, which continues to discriminate against persons with disabilities (Lombana, 1989). Counseling services can facilitate fuller participation of persons with disabilities in education and employment, but these services must be provided in an enabling context and by counselors or counseling-related professionals practicing within the bounds of their professional knowledge and skills (Humes, et al 1989).

The suggestion that rehabilitation counselors be employed by school districts is a not a new thought but

needs to be reconsidered as it makes ultimate good sense. School guidance counselors and other student services personnel have gained little, if any, credibility in terms of their roles with students with disabilities. Most counseling is still provided by special education teachers rather than certified and designated school counselors (Humes et al. 1989). The simple fact is that school counselors are not counseling students with disabilities nor are they providing them with adequate career guidance (Lombana, 1989). Since school represents an institution where children gather on a consistent and long-term basis; the facilities are available and usually comprehensive; and the opportunities for collaboration and cooperation are almost boundless; it would seem sensible for school districts to employ rehabilitation counselors to become an integral part of the student services team. This would be one way of making interagency cooperation a practical reality as well as provide education and support to school counselors, teachers, and others in the school setting (Lombana, 1989). It is not the fault of the school guidance counselor, already belabored by

mounting problems with bulging case loads and administrative duties, while hampered by lack of confidence and knowledge about service agencies and developmental needs of children with disabilities (Hosie, et al, 1989). What seems to be at issue is a growing demand for services that remains unanswered. It is too late to begin the transition process after graduation, or even in the final year of formal education. The transition process must begin as early as possible, coordinating as many resources as possible. This will include the resources of the school counselor as well as other education professionals and business people. Additionally, since each child with a disability is unique, individual transition plans must be developed for each, along with the individualized educational plan. It also should be noted, that while some students may not be in need of special services during their school years, e.g., children with physical disabilities, they still may need transitional services. Above all it must be remembered that the services of vocational rehabilitation are not entitlement services but

eligibility services, meaning that although a child might qualify for special services in the school system, they may not qualify for rehabilitative services. That leaves many children outside the adult service delivery system, with little or no preparation in the world of work. Early identification of children with disabilities who will need intervention by the appropriate resources will ensure proper growth and development. The development and coordination of services by a school based rehabilitation counselor can provide appropriate identification and utilization of resources in order to ensure that the full potential of children with disabilities is realized.

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